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The Chinese Preacher

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THE phrase "New China" is almost trite already. We have the new church as well as the new political and commercial life. In no department of our mission work, unless it be the educational, is this new spirit felt so much, probably, as in our evangelistic work.

After a furlough absence of over a year certain impressions are made upon one which might otherwise be lost. We have set down a few of these impressions which associate themselves with the native preacher. We confine ourselves to the native preacher merely in order to establish a limit in an otherwise limitless field.

I. *The Chinese Preacher is finding himself.*

There is a new spirit manifest among our preachers. Speaking generally, in the past the preacher has been content to view himself as a salaried employee of the mission, from whom certain work was expected in consequence of his training and his salary, with a reasonable degree of devotion to duty. He feared to digress from the old trodden paths, partly through inclination, and partly through unwillingness to assume responsibility or to incur the possible displeasure of the Muk-Sz should his undertaking fall short of success. Moreover, with his constituency new things were not popular. It required too much nerve strain to venture anything new and incur opposition in the doing, or risk ridicule in case of failure. The result of all this was a subservient plodding along old well-worn paths at a pace carefully calculated to insure the preacher's favorable standing and the preservation of his own precious face before his people.

Now, however, this is changed. On all sides the people demand the new things; indifferently sacrificing the old, hoary as they may be with tradition. Under this influence from without our preachers have discovered new powers within them-

selves. They, in many cases, have discovered that the various suggestions and methods taught them in their theological training were not so fantastic or useless after all. They are discovering the fact that they have some methods and ideas not in the possession of their people. In the new ways they can move among the students of the new schools and hold a position of some prestige.

One result of this discovery is that more than one of our preachers has just "found himself." I know a preacher whose methods and schemes for creating interest and developing the work of his chapel have surprised us by their unique character—in some instances amused us as well. However, though it strike us in some cases as of doubtful wisdom, we rejoice and encourage him, for it all goes to show that he has begun to do what we have desired all along—use his own brains and ingenuity.

With one preacher it has taken the form of the development of the church's self-support, to be attained fully within five years. With another it has run toward schools; he has three in connection with his chapel. Each man is doing good work and getting results, though working along his own peculiar lines.

To afford an outlet for this new ambition to strike out on new lines we have made a carefully prepared map, formed a circle of a certain radius round each chapel, studied the market centres and villages within that circle, thrown upon each preacher the responsibility for the spiritual care of his circle, promising reasonable financial aid; and told him to go ahead. Already results are beginning to come in. One of our preachers has arranged to care for three different chapels. Another proposes two preaching places besides his city chapel. A third proposes to care for two market centres. A fourth, for the time being a free lance, took literature and spent some time in each of four market centres, in two of which we will probably open chapels within a year.

It is planned in certain cases to organize Sunday Schools in the homes or shops of Christians in neighboring villages, to which willing workers, under the general direction of the preacher, may go each Sunday afternoon.

At one chapel ten or more members accompany the preacher each Wednesday evening at 6 o'clock to one of a half-dozen villages or convenient points in the city, where an

open air Gospel service is held. The attendance varies from 50 to 100. On the Sunday evening following, the preacher revisits the place, accompanied by a few singers, where he again preaches while the C. E. Society is in session at the chapel.

One of our theological students while on probation, possessing some musical ability, has been employed at various chapels in coaching the preacher's organ playing and in organizing the younger members into a "choir" for better music at the services.

Almost any one of these methods of work would have been left untried by our preachers a few years ago as too great an innovation or too impracticable.

II. *The Preacher and the Church.*—Self-government and Self-support.

Here we have an echo of the self-government spirit abroad in the land. Fortunately, so far as known in our parts, this spirit of independence has taken no objectionable forms, but has had a healthy effect upon the church. The preachers have had their ambition aroused to seek ordination as pastors. The people feel that the old bogey, loss of foreign financial aid, must give way before the new spirit of independence; that the church must keep pace with the independence of spirit shown in commercial and political affairs; that the church, lining up with these developments, must prepare for early self-government.

The organization of the new Presbyterian Church in China has been timely.

Locally each of our chapels has chosen two deacons; two chapels have two elders each in addition. These were installed in form, and considerable importance attached to their office.

The self-supporting movement has taken different forms. The Yeungkong city chapel has secured subscriptions for the year sufficient to cover all its work. The Muiluk chapel has well under way an accumulating fund which in five years will afford an income sufficient to cover all expenses, when ordination for its preacher will be asked. Either of these plans should work. The former is somewhat Western and open to all the difficulties which accompany its working in the home lands. The latter is more akin to the Chinese methods, and will probably be more successful in practice, though not in keeping with our ideas of individual repeated free-will offer-

ings. In other parts we have heard of a gradually reducing scheme of mission aid being employed. So far as I am aware it has never been tried in South China.

In some cases a moving factor in all this is the church's desire to secure whom it will as its preacher; in others the ambition of the preacher himself for the enlarged standing and influence of the pastorate. On the whole it is but an expression of the times; seeking new things. Just why, no one knows quite clearly.

III. *The Preacher and his Preaching.*

Here a marked change is evident. Five years ago I said to our theological class: "Your style of preaching ten years hence will be very different from what it is to-day. Now you need but unfold and explain the simple Gospel to willing receptive listeners; then you will need to meet questions, disputings, and doubtings; 'ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you.' Now the Gospel has nothing to contend with save native idolatry and the natural evil of the human heart; then it will have to contest the ground with all sorts of 'isms' and religious fads, to say nothing of false doctrines."

But one half of those ten years has passed, yet any evangelistic worker knows already how the prophecy is coming to pass.

How often in earlier years you have heard the preacher proclaim that all the world outside of China worships one God, has one religion, etc. Now, however, every preacher and practically every Christian knows all too well of the many divisions, contentions, sins and sorrows of the outside world. They are being driven more and more from their old way of viewing Christianity as a national affair, the possession of Western lands, the secret of their success, etc.; driven to a new line of apologetics, the defence of the Gospel on its own merits, its effect upon the individual heart and life, evidences near at hand. This is a change for the better.

On all sides there is evidence of loss of the earlier foreign prestige. Eight or ten years ago, before I could speak the language, I used to sit on the platform as the magnet, drawing the crowds, while a native preacher preached. To-day both he and I must resort to attractions—musical, pictorial, etc.—to draw our hearers. We have become common-place enough.

It has of late been a source of great surprise to us how my wife can travel with me in parts where, so far as known, no foreign woman has ever been, with scarce a passing notice taken of her presence.

Our preachers too are losing the old prestige which a superficial foreign contact once gave them and are being forced to study to regain and retain their position. The common possession of the government school students everywhere, their Western learning, eclipses his limited stock completely. Having lost this, which was once, to some extent, compensation for some lack of native learning, he is forced to seek a new standard of training and study.

Our Yeungkong station has just adopted a graded preacher's examination scheme. It covers six years and carries with each examination an increase of salary; no other increase being allowed. The examinations include, besides Biblical and theological subjects, a wide course of reading of current literature with approved periodicals and the ability to play the organ. Text-books are conditionally supplied free a year in advance. The examination is to be held by three men, other than the missionaries in charge, in connection with the annual meeting of Presbytery. The preacher is thus early brought into relation with Presbytery and the wider workings of the church.

A month or more of instruction at some central point each year, in addition to his individual study, completes the scheme.

Texts with suggested analyses or outlines are occasionally passed round to each preacher, who in turn submits some sermon outline which he thinks especially good.

IV. *The Preacher and Women's Work.*

Whether due to the demand of the Chinese woman for notice and the consequent recognition of her claim by the men of the new China, or to other causes, there are certainly signs of a silent revolution in woman's status in all our evangelistic work.

Three years ago there was in our Kochau field absolutely no provision for women's attendance at any of our services except Sunday noon, and even then miserable provision in but two of our older chapels.

This year at almost all of our services in every chapel women have been in attendance. In one case the women

occupy the pews of one side, the men of the other, with nothing to separate save the middle common aisle.

Better still, however, is the attitude of the preachers toward the women. Not long since most of our preachers—honesty, we fear, compels us to admit—would have considered it beneath them—a condescension at least—to address a body composed of women only. Our preachers to-day are devising all sorts of means for the care of women's work. Three chapels have girls' schools; one has also a Sunday School with upwards of forty women and girls; while on Mrs. Patton's dispensing days a preacher delivers a carefully prepared talk to the women patients while in waiting. Every one of our preachers to-day wants a trained Bible-woman to work among the women of his field.

V. *The Preacher and the Missionary.*

Once the preacher was the employee of the missionary; to-day he is the co-laborer. The change has not been in the missionary; at least not wholly. It is one of the effects upon the preacher of the changing times.

The change too *is*, in some sense, in the missionary. As we saw in our first point the preacher is finding himself, and consequently sees himself in a new relation to the missionary in charge. This the missionary himself correspondingly feels. To him it is a change. He and the preacher may now discuss and plan work upon an entirely new basis with a new motive in the mind of each. He now is advisor, counsellor, friend. The preacher feels it and comes to him the more freely with the interests of his work. It is happy all round, for if perchance the missionary once was a wee bit inclined toward arbitrary decisions or dictatorial decrees, he is now deposed from his throne. Then he spake, and it was done; now he confers, gives a why and a wherefore for each step, and they together lay the matter before the Lord in prayer.

In our work a monthly report of his daily work in more or less detail with notes is submitted regularly by each preacher. Once, the preacher would have resented such as an imposition, a reflection upon his integrity. Now, he submits to it as an aid to suggestion or advice.

One of the greatest aids in the cultivation of better acquaintance with the work and workers is a residence in the various chapels. At least a week has been spent in each of

our chapels; in two cases much longer periods; one being four months. For such a purpose nothing equals this plan. By taking complete charge of all its activities for the period an object-lesson in church affairs may be given which will leave a lasting impression upon the chapel group and render the introduction of better methods much easier for the preacher.

VI. *The Preacher and his Spirituality.*

We sincerely wish we might mark as great a change here as elsewhere, but fear we cannot. Here lies the "one thing needful." Men and means and methods are essential, but are by no means everything.

We sometimes feel that the setting of the house in order must precede the entrance of the Spirit, yet it is equally true that the entrance of the Spirit is a first requisite to setting the house in order.

Our preachers certainly lack spirituality of life and spiritual power in preaching. But why? This is our most serious problem. To this we have given more anxious thought and earnest prayer than to all else combined, yet the problem remains unsolved. We believe our preachers are doing more preaching than they ever did; are expending more energy; are employing more method, thought, and care, yet souls are not being born into the kingdom as they should. Why? We know that it is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, yet why has the Spirit not been with us and with our preachers? Is the fault in us their spiritual advisors? In this do we fail to lead? Have we taught them to look out only and not up? Heart searching questions such as these have been weighing upon us for months; as yet with no solution in sight.

Showers of blessing have fallen upon those of other parts; why not upon us? May we, the missionary, our preachers, our Bible-women, all upon whom falls the responsibility for any share in this work, speedily bring all the tithes into the storehouse and prove the Lord of hosts therewith if He will not open to us the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it. May the Lord of the harvest send such showers of refreshing upon the hearts of the workers He has already sent forth, that the ingathering of the harvest may speedily be complete.

